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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a model that offers strategies for enhancing quality relationships across the family life cycle. The materials support the identification of characteristics of strong families and describe the course of marital development. The model includes a description of the need for an educational and/or intervention framework to enhance family relationships across the life span of marriage. Competencies needed in the pre-marital stage, continuing through each stage of marriage/no children and parenthood to retirement, widowhood, and death are identified. Suggestions for family counselors are also given. (JA)

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COMPETENCIES NEEDED IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE BY CATEGORY OF ADULT DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The building of strengths within the family requires active participation by family members at all stages of the family life cycle. The married couple faces the crucial challenge of providing the climate for improving the quality of family life. Their parental skills require leadership during the early years of marriage. Sustaining and enhancing marital competencies present a continuing challenge throughout adult development. Marital and parental tasks often compete for time and energy, and these joint responsibilities are often crowded out by occupational and organizational commitments.

A model will be presented to offer strategies for enhancing quality relationships across the family life cycle. However, preliminary to constructing the model, it is necessary to provide research support to identify characteristics of strong families and to describe the course of marital development. The later section of this article will build upon this research foundation to provide concrete suggestions to enhance family competencies.

CHARACTERISTICS OF STRONG FAMILIES

The challenge of strengthening family life depends upon gaining knowledge about strong, healthy families. It was to this challenge that the Family Strengths Research Project was initiated by studying strong families at the different stages of family life (Stinnett, 1979; Stinnett, Sanders, & DeFrain, 1981). The study which began with 130 strong families in Oklahoma later was expanded nationally to include urban and

rural families from every region of the nation, South American families, and immigrant Russian families. Families from such ethnic backgrounds as Blacks, Poles, Jews, Italians, and Hispanics were included.

Six qualities emerged from the strong family profiles that suggest what can be done to make family life a positive force in all families.

1. *Spending time together.* They worked together and played together. They ate meals together. They structured their life style in such a way that they spent a great deal of their time together in all aspects of their lives. Our later studies of strong families have shown a propensity for doing things together outdoors--walking, camping, jogging, birdwatching, and playing outdoor games. We have speculated that the outdoors is inspiring; it provides an aesthetic quality for many people. Another possible explanation is that there are fewer distractions outdoors, enabling family members to concentrate on each other more and communicate more effectively with each other.

2. *Good communication patterns.* These families spend their time together talking to each other. They are good listeners. They had quarrels but they were able to get things out in the open and discuss them. They shared their feelings, identified their problems, and found solutions.

3. *High degree of commitment.* We all need someone we can count on to give emotional support. The family members in these strong families were committed to promoting each other's happiness and welfare. They were also committed to the family group. They invested a lot of time and energy into their families. They structured their lives to relieve themselves of unnecessary stress from outside.

4. *High degree of religious orientation.* All of the families considered themselves to be religious although not all belonged to an organized church. Although most of the families went to church regularly and spent time in family prayer and bible reading, their religious faith was a practical, personal, day-to-day religion rather than theoretical. They were committed to a spiritual life style. These families indicated that the awareness of God in their daily lives helped them to be less petty, more forgiving, and more patient with each other.

5. *Appreciation.* These families expressed a great deal of appreciation for each other. Sincere compliments built each other up psychologically. The positive psychological strokes they gave helped each other feel good about themselves. These family members had learned to express their feelings positively instead of tearing each other down. Each individual had learned how to accept compliments as well.

6. *Ability to deal with crisis in a positive way.* The families in studies of family strengths (Stinnett, Knorr, DeFrain, & Rowe, 1981) had experienced a wide variety of crises but they dealt with crisis in similar ways. First, they could take a bad situation, see something positive about the crisis, and could focus on that positive aspect. The realization of how much they meant to each other and how much they appreciated each other helped them over the rough spots. Secondly, they united together to deal with the crisis. They helped each other and were a support system for each other. The had interdependence.

Within the South American families and the immigrant Russian families, the extended family and traditions played more prominent roles in building family strengths than was the case in the national and Oklahoma studies. The potential for promoting family strengths through the exercise of family traditions has been largely ignored in our family life literature.

The six characteristics, mentioned above, tend to overlap. They could be six aspects of the same basic principle. Families that appreciate each other, spend time together, and work together to solve problems demonstrate their commitment to the family as a group. These qualities also tend to promote more effective communication and enable families to deal with crises more successfully. The cultivation of these qualities can enhance the quality of family life at all stages of the family life cycle.

STRENGTHENING MARITAL COMPETENCIES

The discovery of strengths in long lasting marriages provides useful criteria for evaluating the quality of marital relationships. Lewis and Spanier (1979) have conceptualized that marital quality is a major ingredient in marital stability that is defined as a marriage which remains intact.

They have observed that an important element of marital quality is the extent of rewards each receives from spousal interaction.

The major purpose of a recent study (Rowe, 1981) conducted at the University of Nebraska was to describe certain subjective rewards from spousal interaction noted by each partner in 71 marriages intact from 25 to 62 years. Specifically, an instrument was devised to measure three qualities: (1) retrospective evaluation of the degree of marital happiness perceived by decades of the marriage career, (2) frequency and reciprocity of choosing the spouse as one of the most significant intimates, and (3) the major reasons claimed for remaining married for so long. The results are reported according to the various lengths of married life, split into approximate thirds: (1) couples married 25-34 years (median age of 51), (2) couples married 35-49 years (median age of 65), and (3) couples married 50 years or more (median age of 77).

Perceptions of marital happiness varied according to the number of years married. Couples married under 35 years characterized their marriages as following a curvilinear pattern that was "U" shaped. They remembered their beginnings as very happy (rated 100 percent) but declining rapidly during the first decade to 78 percent, leveling out during the second decade, and recovering to a 90 percent rating by the end of about 30 years. This followed a pattern reported in cross-sectional research by Rollins and Cannon (1974) and Spanier, Lewis, and Cole (1975). The perceptions of couples married between 35 and 49 years revealed a marital happiness curve described by the letter "L." They recalled their newly-wed period as nearly perfect (95 percent) and like the previous group reported a decline during the first decade but by not as much to 82 percent. However, their perceptions of marital happiness remained virtually unchanged from the tenth through past their fortieth year. The oldest couples perceived that they were only "happy" (80 percent) in the beginning and they reported that same rating for the entire marriage history of 50 or more years.

When asked to list their ten closest intimates, the spouse was selected first by 48 percent of the sample. However, there was considerable variation by length of marriage, with the spouse being picked first by 60 percent of the youngest group, 49 percent of the middle group, but only 28 percent of those married 50 or more years. For this latter group one of the adult children was named ahead of the spouse. Another indicator of the relative regard for spouse was measuring the degree of reciprocity between husbands and wives in selecting each other as one of their

closest intimates. The couples married for the least number of years reciprocated more frequently (44 percent compared with 38 percent of the middle group and only 11 percent of the most aged). It is unclear whether there is an absolute loss of intimacy with longevity or merely an increase in emotional satisfactions enjoyed from children, grandchildren, and other extended kin relative to spouses. It may simply be that the intensity of conjugal relations declines from the earlier married years but a strong residual remains which sustains the marital bond with joint enjoyment of adult children and their families.

Some aspect of love was mentioned by 62 percent as the major reason for having remained married for so many years with little variation noted by gender and number of years married. Among the longest married, there was a tendency to view love in a deeper spiritual sense by using such expressions as "faithfulness," "fidelity," "self-fulfillment," and "respect." Among other reasons stated, companionship and commitment increased correspondingly with length of time married.

This retrospective study of longevous marriages highlights several implications for strengthening family competencies over the marital career. Couples need the most help with marriage enrichment at the time that parenthood pressures are taking their toll. Likewise, young married couples should be reassured that their happiness with marriage is likely to improve with the end of child rearing. Couples married 50 years or more receive much emotional satisfaction from intimacy experienced with adult children and grandchildren. The sacrifices of the child rearing years were paying dividends in terms of providing psychological fulfillment. Since love is such an important reason to get married as well as to sustain marriage, adults need to understand the various components of love in a long-term relationship.

A MODEL FOR ENHANCING COMPETENCIES IN ADULT LIFE

Reported research on the characteristics of "strong" families and longevous marriages marriages indicate that the following characteristics and competencies were present in "quality" family relationships: (1) mutual love, respect, and appreciation; (2) companionship, time, and activities in common; (3) good communication and listening skills; (4) high degree of commitment and a willingness to meet each other's needs; (5) commitment to self-development and autonomy of each person and helping each other as the need arises; (6) high degree of

religious orientation and deep commitment to certain spiritual values; and (7) personality compatibility which allows the family to resolve crises and enjoy each other.

Based upon this and other research done by Gingles and Van Zandt (1982), Guerney (1977), Lingren (1979), and Mace and Mace (1978), we are suggesting an education and/or intervention framework to enhance quality relationships across the life span of marriage. It is the authors' view that if couples are to successfully build and enrich a marital relationship (to ensure marital quality, satisfaction, and stability), this process must begin at the mate-selection stage. Any intervention schema must necessarily be multifaceted in nature and will involve a variety of straregies to be utilized in each category of marital development.

One major constraint of this model is that it assumes people will be married throughout much of their adult lives. Consequently, we have identified seven categories of marital development as a basis for explaining the major competencies for meeting individual, marital, and parental tasks.

This model makes several assumptions: (1) that marriage is a process; (2) that new competencies are needed at different phases of adult married life and old ones are continually sharpened; (3) that if the marital system is functioning well and it is satisfying to both partners, the family system will function well; and (4) that planning (selecting goals, developing strategies, and coping with the consequences) are part of life.

It is also assumed that all married persons are involved in "lifelong learning" and interface takes place at several points: (1) within the couples themselves; (2) between the parents and their children; and (3) between the family units and society. Therefore, programs must be developed in order to move from institutional research on the family system to implementation by the family.

Mace (1976) has suggested that the two dynamic emotions of marriage are love and anger. While it is important to establish the love-bond, it is equally if not more important to teach people to "make friends with anger." Anger is the "defense system" of the ego. If not managed, it can reactivate old conflicts. When love and anger work together, the couple can achieve intimacy. So the task is for the couple to accept anger as a gift and use it constructively with love in the maintenance of one's personality.

Category I Pre-Marital

Intimacy Building. Intimacy in marriage is experienced by individuals as warmth, openness, trust, and acceptance (James, 1979). The intimacy building process is multi-faceted and includes intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual forms of intimacy. Intellectual intimacy refers to the sharing of ideas and beliefs. Physical intimacy includes sharing of time, space, and body. Emotional intimacy refers to the sharing of wants and feelings. Spiritual intimacy includes being able to enter the other person's life and feel what the other person is experiencing; the two becoming one. It also includes building and sharing common values concerning what is important in life and sharing common feelings and concerns.

Goodness of Fit. In addition to love, a couple must consider the "goodness of fit" of their relationship which includes examining the differing characteristics from their socioeconomic backgrounds. How compatible are the husband and wife in their personal, social, and emotional ways of dealing with life? Do they complement each other? Can they achieve emotional closeness as they live and work together? Variety adds spice to life, but it also adds opportunity for conflict.

Marriage is often based on idealistic and unrealistic expectations about the time, energy, and skills necessary for high marital quality. The premarital task is to discuss expected role behaviors of husband and wife as they pertain to job, parenting, sex, home, and their married life together. The couple must learn about their differentness and arrive at an operational consensus.

Life Goal Planning. In planning life's goals, the husband-to-be should consider his short-term and long-term goals--for himself and for his occupation. He should examine what he expects from his wife--both early in their marriage as well as later on in the future. The wife-to-be should consider her own goals as well, not only for the present, but for 10, 20, and 50 years in the future. What does she want her husband to be like in terms of his career? His family? What about a career for herself? How will they mesh career conflicts? What about children? Who will care for them? Trilling (1977) contended that young women are too vague about their goals with no clear cut idea of how they will go about affecting others in the positive manner they expect. Both husband and wife must look at their relationship goals as a couple and what they expect their marriage to be like. What are they willing to do to accomplish those goals?

Marital Rules and Boundaries. All systems need a set of rules to serve as a guide for conflict management so the system can fulfill its function. Marriage is no exception. Marital rules describe the couple's way of relating to each other (Lessor, 1974). Each person should be particularly sensitive to any violation of the rules that would disturb the integrity of the relationship. Couples need a general consensus about the content and hierarchy of their marital rules, instead of assuming they are following a similar set of expectations.

Boundaries refer to the openness or closedness of the marriage system--who is let in and who is kept out. Who shares what with whom?

Communication: A Sharing of Meaning. Communication is one of the interpersonal competency skills necessary for fulfillment of the companionship marriage (Foote & Cottrell, 1955). Communication originates from the word "communis"--to share in common. Communication begins with self-awareness, of what each individual is thinking, wanting, and feeling, and a willingness for self-disclosure to one's partner. Self-disclosure must be followed by a willingness to listen with the heart as well as the head, and to support and esteem each other by showing appreciation for the things the partner does or says. Only through effective communication can a couple move toward the intimacy they seek.

Family Planning. The image for an ideal family devoted to its children bears little resemblance to the fact that most children are born because sex is pleasurable (Bailey, 1976). However, both husband and wife can learn about each other's values as they jointly plan methods of birth control. They can also integrate their family plans with career expectations for both husband and wife.

Category II Married - No Children

Time Together. The following formula is given for describing a satisfying relationship: SR = Effort + Insight + Time. Bronfenbrenner (1977) suggests that parents often give children too little time and much of the time given is negative overtime. It is often difficult to convince a wife and husband of the need to sit down and talk with each other about their marriage, their hopes, and their dreams for as little as 15 minutes per day. A high quality marriage or family life takes time together to plan, to share, and to do things together. Time together must be fitted into the

daily schedule of a marriage system. A marriage cannot be given "left over" time. It needs "prime time."

Shared Interests. The old adage, "The family that plays together, stays together," begins early in the marriage. Sharing in each other's interests and planning shared activities helps to build togetherness. One difficulty many couples experience today is that they live as "married singles." That is, they share fewer and fewer common interests and become more socially, intellectually, and emotionally distant from each other.

Relationship Enhancement. Enhancement is the task process of "refueling" the marriage relationship, of providing positive bombardment for the marriage. It is a procedure for providing the couple with a periodic marital "tune-up." Enhancement is the "lubricant" that greases the parts of a marriage relationship. Relationship enhancement (or marriage enrichment) means developing a realistic appreciation of the partner as a person and valuing each other's contributions to the marriage (Guerney, 1977). This involves learning techniques of marital stroking, of supporting each other, and of developing the bondedness of the relationship. When couples practice positive expressions of appreciation and support, coping with stress-producing situations is less difficult.

Social Supports. Developing new couple friends seems to be important in the early years of marriage. Reports from conciliation court counselors suggest that conflicts arise because of a lack of common friendships which is necessary to bring the couple together. Learning to accept each other's other sex friends or same sex friends, without jealousy, requires sensitivity and understanding. It is often difficult to find another couple with whom you can have an equal attachment in which both husband and wife like both persons. Tolerance is needed on both sides. Sheehy (1974) considered the "closed dyad" of the husband and wife without outside friends to be unhealthy.

Dual Career Management. In 1980, 56.6 percent of the women with children under 17 were in the labor force (*Omaha World-Herald*, 1980). About 75 percent of two-parent families will have both parents at work by 1990 (*Childcare*, 1980). Women work today both out of economic necessity as well as for self-fulfillment. Some cost/benefit analysis figures suggest the minimum monetary value of the stay-at-home mother is $18,000 to $20,000 per year. Many men and women do not agree upon whether the mother should stay at

home or pursue a career, or do both. Dual-career marriages often mean less time available with spouse or children. How do persons cope with their unmet needs because their partner is not there, or because each has to do more household or other tasks than envisioned? How does the couple/family compensate for and negotiate these potential conflict-producing situations? They need to clarify whether one of the couple's jobs take precedence or whether both are equally important. This too may change during the marriage life cycle.

Developing New Relationships with Parents. Learning to respect the family values of the partner and to accept the ritual and traditions of each other's parents helps build integrity. Likewise, both husband and wife need to develop a new relationship with their own parents on a more adult-to-adult level than previously possible. An interdependence between the generations can be established where both may help or be helped as the need arises. There is a need to understand and to accept the parent as having tried to be a satisfactory parent.

Category III Married - Young Children

Parenting and Child Development. Parenting is both an action and an attitude. It is a way of nurturing the child based on acceptance, respect, and responsibility. Effective parenting requires time, patience, and willingness to model appropriate childhood behavior. Effective parenting requires listening with the heart as well as the head. It requires listening for understanding and hearing the needs of the child. Whether parents are authoritarian, democratic, or permissive in their parenting styles is not nearly as important as providing the child with nurturance and love.

A child will become resourceful is permitted to solve problems. A child will become responsive when treated fairly if parents treat the child with encouragement and respect. Most parents want to be "good" parents, which means they have to be open to new possibilities about relating to children.

Communication--To Share. Communication is a process of sharing one's feelings, wants, opinions, and goals (Miller, Nunnally, & Wackman, 1975). It involves sending a message, getting feedback, clarifying, and checking it out. When children are young, both husband and wife have less energy and take less time for each other so marital communication seems to decline. As the couple negotiates differences that arise in the raising of the children, they can enhance their

own relationship if they keep their perspective and their sense of humor. Activities which strengthen the marriage work to strengthen the family as well. However, they need to schedule activities and time together so they can keep the husband-wife relationship intact and viable both in the present and in the future. Both need to learn to express appreciation and support for each other as a person as well as a parent.

Growing Individually. Each individual needs to expand his own horizon toward new possibilities and toward developing the self to a fuller potential. Often parents of young children lack the time and energy for privacy and self-renewal, and thus one's self-esteem diminishes. The consequences may even be greater when one is trying to become autonomous, to be employed, to be a parent, and to be a marriage partner, all at the same time. Each person needs to participate in one activity which is esteem-building and energy-restoring. Both need to learn to accept themselves as being O.K. instead of comparing one's self with the past or anticipating a new and more rewarding self in the future.

Managing Conflict. Handling crises and conflicts successfully is one of the pillars of family strengths (Stinnett, 1979). Normal, healthy, happy, satisfying marriages do have conflicts. When two different people with two different sets of beliefs, attitudes, life experiences, value systems, and needs and wants start to build a marriage that will be satisfying to both, there will be conflict. Couples do have a choice--to be manipulated and thus controlled by interpersonal or inter-familial conflict--or to use it to enhance the relationship.

Mace (1976) called conflict in relationships a "choice-point." The couple has a choice of working through the conflict or having the conflict create greater distance in the relationship. The causes of conflict in marriage are usually: (1) lack of consensus regarding expectations and prescriptions for various outcomes; (2) lack of uniform commitment to common objectives (what they are or should be); (3) relative deprivation--the persons' needs are not being met relative to what they want; (4) lack of role clarity or agreement on role performance. When conflict is not managed constructively, it leads to dissatisfaction, loss of morale, damage to one's self-esteem, decreasing performance, and relationship dysfunction.

Integrating Work and Home. Agreement on husband-wife role performance is important as each assumes a responsible

attitude toward housekeeping and family maintenance tasks as well as caring for children. Role expectations may shift as children grow older, as careers change, or if health problems or disability affects either husband or wife. Marriage is not a "50-50" proposition. Setting priorities is most important when both persons are working in order to achieve a balance between the demands of home, family, job, the other, and self. An appreciation of each other's contribution and a willingness to "pitch in" when the partner needs it helps to build marital solidarity.

Appreciating spiritual values. One of the striking elements of a strong family was their high level of religious orientation (Stinnett, 1979). Religion affects families and families affect religion. Religion can support and strenghten or it can distress and oppress. A shared spiritual life provides a basis for common values and a sense of purpose within the family, supporting the contention that "the family that prays together, stays together." Furthermore, there is a strong correlation between religion and success and happiness in all phases of life (Stinnett, 1979).

Category IV Married - Adolescent Children

Parent-Child Relationship Skills. As children assert their autonomy and independence, they may challenge childhood rules and expectations. It is imperative that both parents and children learn to communicate with and listen attentively to each other. Both parents and children can learn how to be assertive (not aggressive) and learn the art of decision making, negotiation, and compromise. Both need to recognize that the parent-adolescent period involves two changing individuals, each with his or her own needs to be met and tasks to be resolved.

Bettelheim (1981) stated that "the best way to help adolescents become independent and move out of the home is for parents to let them know that they are accepted as they are. They are O.K. persons." It takes parental strength to provide for individuation (the need for the child to become a separate person) but the payoffs are high in terms of developing adolescent self-esteem and a sense of responsibility.

Coping with Parent-Teen Conflicts. The teenager's push for autonomy and independence from parental restrictions and values occurs at the same time parents are experiencing transition and change at mid-life. Parents are faced with the issues of their own mortality and that of their aging

parents. They are struggling with their own career, marital, and personal decisions and may have minimal emotional resources to put into the relationship with their adolescents. It has been suggested (Gould, 1978) that as parents respond to their children or make decisions about their children, they conform to or deny their own parents and thus may re-experience their own unresolved parent-child conflicts.

An escalation of power struggles often results if the parental imperative is to "control." The result is an even greater distance between parents and adolescents. The teen does want parental guidance, but also wants input into the decision-making process. To be patient and to love the sometimes unlovable is a great challenge for the parent and for the teen (Lingren, 1981).

Self-Assessment: Reframing and Integration. Mid-life have been defined as that point where the individual starts counting how many years there are left to live rather than the number of years since birth (Neugarten & Gutmann, 1968). A process of self-redefinition and reframing which involves a reevaluation of the meaning and purpose of one's life as it has been lived may occur. It may involve what Jung (1971) has termed the "integration of the anima" in men and the "integration of animas" in women--where men integrate the affective component and women integrate the instrumental component into their personalities. It has been described as a time for eliciting exuberance, excitement, and renewed energy with increased life satisfaction. It has also been pictured as a time for confrontation with existential terror and psychosocial decline. The disparity is between what one has gained from living within a particular structure and what one wants for oneself. This incongruence may instigate a soul-searching for "what I really want." It involves the need to establish a firm niche in society in a way that is personally meaningful (Levinson, Darrou, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978).

Reconciliation with Same-Sex Parent. Adults may think they become independent of their parents when they leave home, but they may find themselves finishing the task during their middle years. By the forties (Gould, 1978), it seems imperative that the daughter has come to terms with her mothers as a person and the son accept his father as a "good-enough" father, in spite of the shortcomings of each. A new type of maturity develops as adults accept their parents as persons and accept those characteristics within themselves which are like their parents.

Marriage Renewal. As parents begin the rehearsal for their children leaving home, the whole marriage system often comes in for critique and reevaluation. If one's task is to modify the negative elements of the present structure and to test new choices, one's marriage may be broken up. If not, the task must be marriage renewal or the couple may live in quiet desperation in an "empty-shell" marriage. According to Le Shan (1973), it is important for middle-aged partners to become good friends, who know and respect each other, even though they know each other's weaknesses. The skills of appreciating and esteeming each other, listening with the heart, and managing differences creatively become highly significant.

Category V Middle Age - Launching Children

The Children Leave Home. Rollins and Feldman (1970) found marital satisfaction to be high at the time of child bearing and low during the period when children are leaving home. Kerckhoff (1976) stated that reduced pressures on life during middle age may not lead to marital bliss but to marital blahs. Yet, other research reveals an increase in the quality of married life of the husband and wife as children leave home (Gingles & Van Zandt, 1982). This period provides a new opportunity for husband and wife to turn again to each other for companionship and support. It poses a challenge as husband and wife renew and rebuild their marriage.

Coping with Aging Parents. Adjusting to the aging of one's parents is difficult. Many middle-aged children want to intervene and manage their parents' lives. Instead elderly parents should be encouraged to set goals and make decisions for themselves in order to keep their integrity and their feelings of self-worth. According to Grollman and Grollman (1978), "Listening, sharing, touching, laughing, celebrating can create a loving atmosphere for your parents and you. As you meet their needs, your own needs may be met. As you give them your hands, you may find your own heart. As you help them end their days, you may find new beginnings in youself" (p. 145).

Coming Together. For the couples who survive the raising of their children and look forward to retirement, there seems to be a "coming together" of personality traits. Neugarten (1977) found women became more tolerant of their own aggressive, egocentric impulses as they grew older. Men, as they aged, became more nurturant and affiliative and wanted a life outside of work. When the children leave home, the whole

marriage must be restructured. Both husband and wife have newly emerging needs which must be met (Gould, 1978).

Career Assessment and Pre-retirement Planning. Pre-retirement planning allows a couple to examine possible second careers. Career assessment at this time allows for possible lateral movement to replace the upward struggle of the earlier years so the retirement dream can become a reality, not a nightmare. Developing a broad range of role activities enables the couple to achieve a balance between work and play throughout life (Bolles, 1978). The courage to take new steps allows both husband and wife to find fresh responses and renewed energy for the tasks ahead.

Grandparenting. Grandparenting opens the door for the development of a new kind of intimacy and love with grandchildren, free from the expectations, anxiety, obligations, and tasks of parenting. Troll (1980) reported that more people become grandparents in middle age than in old age. They can enjoy, encourage, and help their children and grandchildren. Affectional ties remain high as the grandchildren become adults themelves. Unless separated by great distances (physical or emotional), these can be delightful years.

Accepting Our Own Aging. In the middle years, individuals begin to realize they will not live forever. It is a time for new strides in emotional growth. At this time many individuals begin to experience loss more frequently. Physical decline may occur, but mental health and social abilities may actually improve. Coping with the loss of parents and friends and facing decline in the functions of the body helps one become more realistic about the aging process itself. Mid-life has been described as a time for nurturing one's own growth. According to Sheehy (1974), "if we can't change, we don't grow. If we don't grow, we aren't really living" (p. 353).

Category VI Retirement

Adaptation to Retirement Living. Retirement is an event that usually means a major adjustment in a person's life. Whether one is retired before being ready or continues to work longer than he or she would like, the best time is when both employer and employee are ready. Even then, there are major changes to face. Although retirement does not have as great an impact as death, the person must go through a grief process of separation from one if not the most important investment of one's life. In retirement, many people have ambivalent

feelings of guilt about not getting up and going to work, yet happy about not having to set the alarm; of findings days a little long and boring, yet looking forward to pursuing new interests and more time with old friends.

Retirement often means adjustment to a smaller income and a reduction in one's standard of living. Or it may mean adjustment to a new job, perhaps of less status and income but less demanding of time and self. Retirement is a transition period in which we must reconsider what we are doing with our time so that we have fulfilling lives even though we have more time for leisure.

Networking. In retirement, one's social environment tends to be dependent on participation in church, community, civic, and volunteer activities instead of work-related activities. How active one becomes varies according to the individual. Many experience increasing social life and a few tend to "drop out" and go into a decline as evidenced by a disproportionate number of deaths in the year following retirement.

As mentioned previously, one's confidants and intimate friends may change in later life. Husbands decline as "intimates" for the wife as adult children are more depended upon to provide a listening ear. Arling (1976) found friends more important than grown children for those older people with high morale.

Relationship Enhancement and Self-Renewal. Retirement offers married couples a new incentive for developing a closer relationship with each other. There is more time to "do things" together such as traveling or pursuing new interests.

David and Vera Mace (1978), when they were in their 70s, developed a "Marriage Potential Inventory" using their own life experiences and insight from a long and happy marriage. This instrument provides a way for couples to assess their marriage and develop a plan of action to enhance their relationship and thus to more fully reach their synergistic potential.

The retirement years often are among the best years of married life. However, with increasing age, one or both spouses experiences losses in hearing, sight, memory, and physical functioning. A strong, sustaining bond is needed to keep the relationship satisfying.

Coping with Loss. The experience of loss increases as one becomes older and is separated or detached from persons or things that have been important. The magnitude of the loss and its meaning or value to the individual affect the

intensity of loss. Some major losses experienced by the elderly, in addition to the loss of spouse, are loss of one's home, loss by death of siblings, friends, and other significant persons, loss of health with increasing physical illnesses, and loss of physical and mental competence. With these losses, one recognizes that death becomes a closer reality for one's self.

Category VII - Widowhood and Death

Life Review. At any time of life it is important to review where you have been as you look forward to the future. It is especially important when adjusting to the death of a mate to look back at the years which have passed and put them into some sort of perspective--to accept him or her for the positive qualities that person expressed while living.

Through the process of life review, one can examine and reintegrate past experiences and unresolved conflicts. This reorganization of past experiences can give new and significant meaning to one's life and help reduce one's fear of death (Butler, 1968).

According to Jung (1971), in the evening of life one should experience an integration of life's experiences. The final task seems to be, as expressed by Erikson (1963), "coming to terms with and accepting one's own life cycle." Although one may wish that some things in life had been different, one is ready to accept the whole as good and to feel good about oneself and know that life has been worthwhile.

Life Is Worthy. Adaptation to aging is now often divided into three stages. The term "young-old" describes the active, retired elderly who are busy with community involvement and leisure activities (Neugarten, 1977). In the stage of later maturity there may be noticeable curtailment of activities because of health problems or some impairment of the senses. During this period, individuals are able to rearrange their own lives quite well but depend on agencies or families for some help. The oldest group, or "frail elderly," many become quite dependent and unable to care for themselves without substantial assistance. They may have to live in nursing homes or be cared for by family members.

In nursing homes, one sees a difference between individuals resigned to approaching death, but sustained by knowing there are those who care about them compared to those who feel abandoned. Hess and Waring (1978) cite higher suicide and death rates in older men who have no family while older women are better able to seek out and maintain friendships when

family members die. At any stage, it is important that one feels worthy.

Adaptation to Old Age and Death. In spite of what a person may think when young, one is never entirely prepared for old age and death. With declining health, economic, and physical resources, there is a need to prepare for the inconveniences and pain of this period. According to Nouwen and Gaffney (1974):

> Aging is the turning of the wheel, the gradual fulfillment of the life cycle in which receiving matures in giving and living makes dying worthwhile. Aging does not need to be hidden or denied, but can be understood, affirmed, and experienced as a process of growth by which the mystery of life is slowly revealed to us. (p. 4)

Investment in Future Generations. Having reached Erikson's (1963) stage of "ego-integrity," the person knows that his or her individual life is something that had to be and is more able now to face death with confidence. At this time the individual may feel freer to enjoy what is left and leave what can be done to the next generation. It is enjoyable for the older person to see children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren growing up to be responsible citizens and to recognize the role he or she has played in making this world a better place in which to live. "Aging is one of the most human processes, one that can only be denied with great harm. Every man and woman who has discovered or rediscovered his or her own aging has a unique opportunity to enrich the quality of his or her own life and that of every fellow human being" (Nouwen & Gaffney, 1974, p. 148).

The elderly need to plan ahead and gain control of the material and financial aspects of their lives. Perhaps with help from the next generations, they can prepare to accept and enjoy a new dependent role in life.

SUMMARY

It has been the purpose of this paper to examine the process of being married through the various stages of the marital life cycle. Building family strengths is a lifetime endeavor. Competencies or tasks necessary and sufficient for a strong marital relationship may vary somewhat in the different stages. Professionals working with families, as

well as the individual marriage partners, can all contribute to healthier families as they work to enhance those competencies as the marriage unfolds.

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